

Lawmakers urge Obama to support submarine plan

By ANDREW MIGA, Associated Press, December 29, 2008

WASHINGTON - Some members of Congress are seeking President-elect Barack Obama's support for producing eight more Virginia class submarines.

Connecticut Rep. Joe Courtney organized a joint letter with more than two dozen House members urging Obama to back doubling production to two new ships per year beginning in 2011, one year ahead of the Navy's previous schedule. The letter is to be sent Tuesday.

"As you evaluate current acquisition programs and make the tough decisions ahead, we encourage your strong support for the Virginia-class submarine program _ a platform of critical importance to our nation's current and long-term defense," the lawmakers wrote.

The request comes as the incoming Obama administration considers its spending plans in dealing with the nation's economic woes.

"There will be many tough decisions ahead of the new president and Congress next year regarding the future of military procurement programs," Courtney said in a statement Monday. "However, with its record of cost reduction, quality and national security value, the Virginia-class submarine remains a shining example of how shipbuilding can, and should, be done."

The letter was signed by a bipartisan group of 28 House members from several states, including Connecticut, Rhode Island, Maine, New Hampshire, New York, Virginia, South Carolina, Pennsylvania and Texas.

The U.S. Navy recently awarded a \$14 billion contract to Groton, Conn.-based Electric Boat and Virginia-based Northrop Grumman Corp. to make more Virginia class subs. Lawmakers are urging Obama's continued support for the new subs as his new administration weighs its budget priorities.

Electric Boat is a division of General Dynamics Corp. that employs more than 10,000 people in Groton and North Kingstown, R.I.

Work on the subs will be done at Electric Boat's Groton and Rhode Island plants and Northrop Grumman's Newport News, Va., facility.

Northrop Grumman employs close to 3,000 workers on the submarine program.

The new contract builds on an existing partnership between Electric Boat and Northrop Grumman, which currently builds one submarine a year for the Navy.

The Virginia class is the first U.S. Navy warship designed in the post-Cold War era.

Earlier this year, the nation's two submarine makers had warned of potential job cuts

amid the economic downturn unless the Navy placed additional ship orders.

In addition to stabilizing the work force, the contract will lead to at least 1,000 new jobs over several years at Electric Boat, company officials have said. Another 500 to 750 jobs would be created by 2011 at Northrop Grumman, the officials have also said.